

## STATCAN COVID-19: DATA TO INSIGHTS FOR A BETTER CANADA



# Canadians' support for random COVID-19 testing

by Kristyn Frank and Rubab Arim

Release date: August 25, 2020



Statistics  
Canada

Statistique  
Canada

Canada

---

## How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca).

You can also contact us by

**Email at** [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)

**Telephone**, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| • Statistical Information Service                             | 1-800-263-1136 |
| • National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired | 1-800-363-7629 |
| • Fax line  | 1-514-283-9350 |

### Depository Services Program

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| • Inquiries line | 1-800-635-7943 |
| • Fax line       | 1-800-565-7757 |

## Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca) under “Contact us” > “[Standards of service to the public](#)”.

## Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

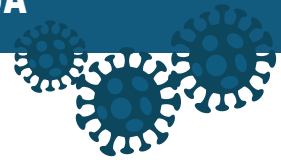
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Industry, 2020

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An [HTML version](#) is also available.

*Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.*

---



## Canadians' support for random COVID-19 testing

by **Kristyn Frank** and **Rubab Arim**

Currently, testing for the prevalence of COVID-19 is limited to individuals who actively seek a test, resulting in a selective set of cases that are largely presenting symptoms associated with the virus. This prevents an accurate measurement of COVID-19 infection rates within the larger population, as asymptomatic individuals generally do not request to be tested for COVID-19 (Hilborne et al. 2020; Padula 2020; Thunström et al. 2020). Random testing for COVID-19 has been suggested as a valuable and efficient means of obtaining a more complete picture of the extent of infection in the population (Hilborne et al. 2020; Padula 2020). However, little is known about whether Canadians support this strategy.

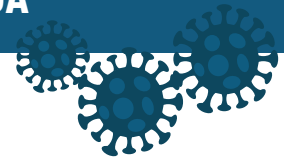
Given the need for timely and accurate evidence of the impact of COVID-19 in the wider population, knowledge of Canadians' attitudes toward a strategy of random COVID-19 testing is useful information for policy makers and public health officials. This study examines the extent to which crowdsourcing participants support random testing for COVID-19, with a focus on differences by sociodemographic characteristics as well as trust levels in governments and public health authorities. Note that crowdsourcing data are not based on a probability sampling design, and the findings should not be inferred to the overall Canadian population.<sup>1</sup>



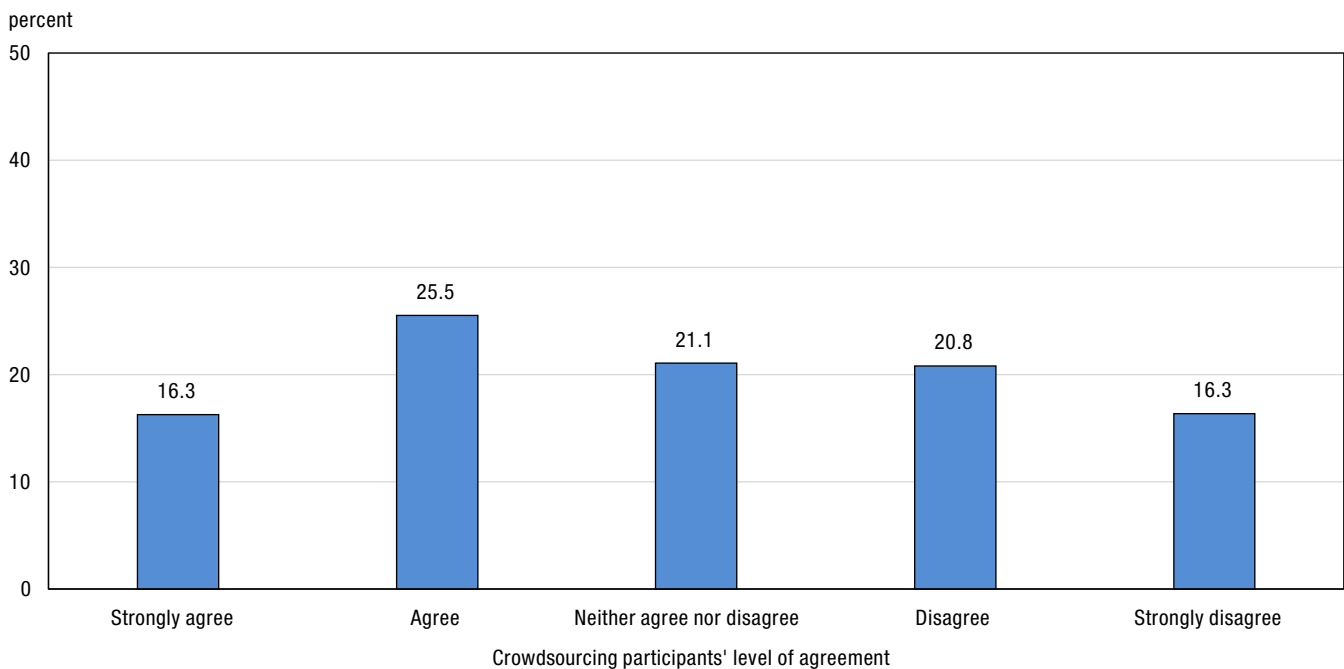
### 4 in 10 crowdsourcing participants were supportive of mandatory random COVID-19 testing

Overall, about 4 in 10 crowdsourcing participants strongly agreed or agreed that Canadians selected at random should be required to take a COVID-19 test (Chart 1). More than one-third of participants indicated that they disagree (20.8%) or strongly disagree (16.3%) with this testing strategy, while about 2 in 10 were unsure (neither agree nor disagree).

1. Please refer to the Methodology section for further information on the crowdsourcing data collection initiative.



**Chart 1**  
**Crowdsourcing participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing**



**Note:** Percent calculations exclude missing responses.  
**Source:** Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Trust in Others: Data Collection Series (5323).

Generally, there were similar levels of support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing between different sociodemographic groups, including gender, education level, and immigration status. One notable exception was by age group. A higher proportion of crowdsourcing participants in the eldest age group (aged 65 or older) indicated a high level of agreement with mandatory random testing than younger crowdsourcing participants aged 15 to 24 (48.5% and 39.4%, respectively).<sup>2</sup>

## Crowdsourcing participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing did not vary by trust in others, government, or public health authorities

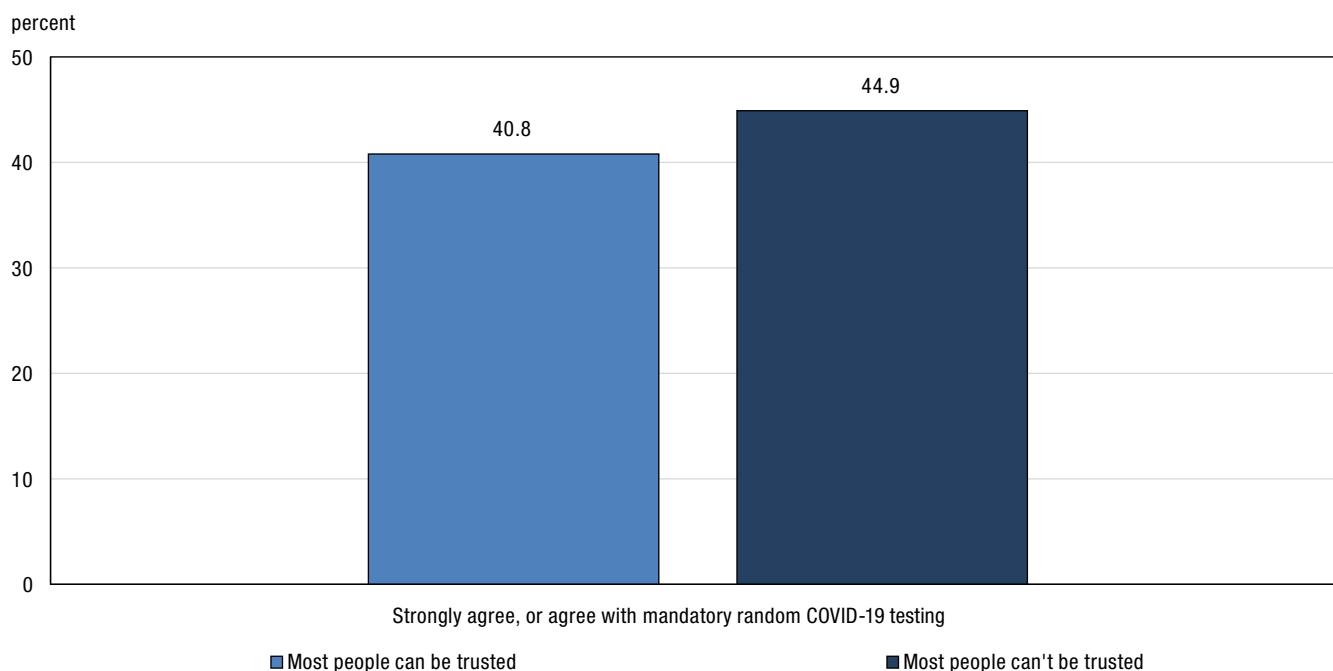
Crowdsourcing participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing did not differ by varying levels of trust in others (Chart 2). About 4 in 10 participants supported mandatory random testing regardless of their level of general trust in other people.

2. Additional results for other age groups, as well as by gender, education level, and immigration status are available upon request. Results were similar between other age groups, between males and females, between different levels of educational attainment, and between immigrants and non-immigrants.



**Chart 2**

**Crowdsourcing participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing, by general trust in other people**



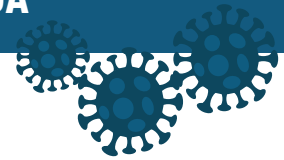
**Note:** Percent calculations exclude missing responses.  
**Source:** Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Trust in Others: Data Collection Series (5323).

Support for mandatory random testing for COVID-19 also did not differ much between crowdsourcing participants who indicated high and low levels of trust in federal, provincial and municipal governments or public health authorities (Table 1). The largest difference was observed between participants with high and low levels of trust in federal public health authorities. Over 4 in 10 participants with a high level of trust in federal public health authorities supported mandatory random testing (43.7%) compared to 36.2% of participants with a low level of trust.

**Table 1**  
**Crowdsourcing participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing, by trust in government and public health authorities**

Trust in government to make good decisions about when and how to reopen workplaces and public spaces	Total		Strongly agree or agree with mandatory random COVID-19 testing	
	Low trust	High trust	Low trust	High trust
	percent			
Federal government	38.5	61.5	37.6	44.4
Federal public health authorities	25.6	74.4	36.2	43.7
Provincial or territorial government	44.2	55.8	39.3	43.7
Provincial or territorial public health authorities	25.7	74.3	39.1	42.7
Municipal government	45.3	54.7	39.8	43.5
Municipal health authorities	34.9	65.1	39.3	43.1

**Note:** Percent calculations exclude missing responses. Crowdsourcing participants' level of trust was measured on a five-point scale, where "1" means "Cannot be trusted at all" and "5" means "Can be trusted a lot." Participants who rated their trust level as a 1, 2 or 3 on the scale are defined as having a low level of trust, and those who rated their trust level as a 4 or 5 are defined as having a high level of trust.  
**Source:** Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Trust in Others: Data Collection Series (5323).



## Summary

Overall, about 4 in 10 crowdsourcing participants indicated support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing. Few differences were observed across sociodemographic groups, although participants aged 65 or older indicated greater support than participants aged 15 to 24. Moreover, the level of support for this health measure varied little by the level of trust participants had in others, in governments, or in public health authorities.

It should be emphasized that the numbers shown in this study reflect participants' attitudes towards mandatory random testing, as measured at the end of May and the beginning of June 2020, i.e. about two months and a half after the beginning of the economic lockdown. Whether such attitudes will become more favourable to mandatory random testing if the duration of the pandemic increases remains to be seen.

## Methodology

Results for this study were drawn from Statistics Canada's crowdsourcing data collection series *The Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Trust in Others*. From May 26 to June 8, 2020 over 36,000 participants voluntarily completed this online questionnaire which focused on the level of trust Canadians have in government, in businesses, and in others, and their views regarding the reopening of workplaces and public spaces. Participants' support for mandatory random COVID-19 testing was determined by their response to the following statement: "Canadians selected at random should be required to take a COVID-19 test." Responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a sample design using probability-based sampling. As a result, the findings cannot be applied to the overall Canadian population. Please refer to Frank and Arim (2020) and Schellenberg and Fonberg (2020) for additional results from this data collection initiative.

## References

Frank, K. and R. Arim. 2020. "Canadians' willingness to get a COVID-19 vaccine when one becomes available – what role does trust play?" Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 45-28-0001.

Hilborne, L.H., Z. Wagner, I. Cabrerros and R.H. Brook. 2020. "Linking statistics with testing policy to manage COVID-19 in the community." *American Journal of Clinical Pathology*. DOI: 10.1093/AJCP/AQAA099.

Padula, W.V. 2020. "Why only test symptomatic patients? Consider random screening for COVID-19." *Applied Health Economics Health Policy*, April 8, 1-2. DOI: 10.1007/s40258-020-00579-4.

Schellenberg, G. and J. Fonberg. 2020. "Crowdsourcing participants' trust in government, public health authorities, businesses, and others during the COVID-19 pandemic". *The Daily*, June 26, 2020. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. Ottawa. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200626/dq200626b-eng.htm>.

Thunström, L., M. Ashworth, J.F. Shogen and S. Newbold. 2020. "Testing for COVID-19: willful ignorance or selfless behaviour?" *Behavioural Public Policy*, May 8, 1-18. DOI: 10.1017/bpp.2020.15.